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ABSTRACT

As part of a study of successful teaching for black students, two case studies of effective teaching for African Americans are presented. To date, eight teachers in a small, predominantly black school district who were identified as being effective teachers by both parents and principals have been interviewed. Two examples demonstrate the characteristics that have resulted in superior teaching for the district's students. One teacher, a white woman of considerable experience, is able to see the commonalities between her life and her students' lives. She emphasizes preparation for her classes and the importance of parent participation. The other teacher, a somewhat younger black woman who also has considerable teaching experience, also establishes a bond between herself and her students. Both teachers exemplify culturally relevant teaching, and both are aware of the fundamental importance and seriousness of the teaching task. Contains 32 notes. (SLD)

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*A TALE OF TWO TEACHERS: EXEMPLARS OF SUCCESSFUL PEDAGOGY FOR BLACK STUDENTS**

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A TALE OF TWO TEACHERS: EXEMPLARS OF SUCCESSFUL PEDAGOGY FOR BLACK STUDENTS

Introduction

The current demographic shift in the make up of our public school population (particularly in large states like California, Texas and New York) has caused educators to more closely examine the academic performance of these students of various ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. With the exception of certain youngsters of Asian descent , students of color are not performing on par with their white counterparts. My particular research interest is with African - American students and the type of teaching which is a significant factor in their academic success.

Recent statistics on black students' scholastic performance are disheartening. Black college enrollment is down. The drop out rate for inner-city youths is 36 percent and rising[1]. Black youngsters are twice as likely to be suspended from school as white youngsters[2] . Black students comprise 17 percent of the nation's public school population yet 41 percent of the special education population [3].

The social and economic context in which this school performance is occurring is also startling. One third of all Black families live below the poverty level of $10,989 a year for a family of four [4]. Seventy-three percent of these poor families are headed by single mothers [5]. Unemployment for black teenagers is

close to 40 percent and gang violence and child abuse are claiming more young black lives each month.

Despite these overwhelmingly dismal realities, there are teachers who have dedicated their lives to teaching black students and who believe that their students are capable of overcoming very long educational odds. This paper is a discussion of two such teachers, their different approaches to and thoughts about teaching, and the common threads that make their pedagogy appropriate for successfully teaching black students. An important issue in this discussion of successful pedagogy is how it differs from the prevailing notions of teacher effectiveness. Past investigations of expert or effective teaching have neglected to consider the importance of student and community culture and instead focused research efforts on generic cognitive processes such as reflective thinking and teacher decision - making [4]. This paper (and the work from which it is drawn) uses a different definition of success and successful pedagogy (for black students) which will be discussed more fully in the subsequent section. The paper also discusses the importance of scholarly inquiry that employs research methods that are consistent with the "collective cultural ethos and world view shared by people of African descent".[5]

What is Success?

When I first began to examine this issue of teachers who are successful in teaching black students I made a conscious decision

not to allow performance on standardized tests be the sole determiner of teacher success because by that criteria alone my search for "successful" teachers teaching in primarily black school settings would be near futile. Despite the fact that the two teachers of minority students who have received nation-wide attention, Marva Collins in Chicago and Jaime Escalante in Los Angeles, had demonstrated their "success" via student performance on standard measures, each of the on-site examinations of what transpires in their classrooms indicates that these teachers do much more than prepare students for standardized exams. I believe that their ability to develop and maintain "culturally healthy" students is a key factor in the students' ability to meet the academic challenges of standardized tests. By "culturally healthy" I am referring to minority (and in this case, specifically black) students who enjoy a high degree of mental, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual health. By these standards, standardized test performance is a very narrow and limited vehicle for measuring student success.

My concerns regarding standardized test performance were aroused after reading a newspaper article on "minority students confronting bigotry on prestigious college campuses"[4] . The article and its companion pieces detailed the experiences of three students, two Hispanic and one black, as they tried to negotiate campus life. The black student and one of the Hispanic students came from what can only be described as middle class households. The other Hispanic student, a young woman, came from a family in the Salinas Valley where her father had worked as a farm laborer.

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During her sophomore year at Cornell the student described her estrangement from her family:

> It was weird going back to Salinas last summer. My dad was upset with me at first, thinking that school was turning me white... A couple of friends told me how stuck-up I've gotten. Maybe it's jealousy, but the truth is, I probably have gotten more uppity. My little sister was really disgusted with the way I was dressing. In Salinas, only the white kids who go to Salinas High wear penny loafers, and I remember vowing to myself that I would never wear them - and there I was wearing them. At Cornell, I felt like I already stuck out enough. I just didn't want to stick out by what I was wearing (p.2L).

This "turning white" or "acting white" phenomenon has been documented by anthropologists Fordham and Ogbu' . A recent newspaper article[10] announcing the release of a Stanford University report on racism quoted a black student who remarked, "As a student here ... I feel like a bastard child at a family reunion"... I feel that the only way I can be accepted as a true Stanford student is to deny my blackness"[11]. These remarks are relevant to Fordham's[12] concept of "racelessness" - a coping strategy employed by high achieving black adolescents as they strive for academic success. In other work examining the performance of "high-achieving" black students, Bacon[13] and Fine[14] both talk of the psychic cost of academic success for black students.

High achieving black students in Bacon's study tended to be social isolates. They had no neighborhood friends and were not welcomed by white students in the school environment. They believed that in order to be successful they had to separate themselves from other blacks or the teacher might believe they were "like them". Fine's forthcoming work indicates that the 'good' urban student is characterized by "A moderate level of depression, an absence of political awareness, the presence of self-blame, low assertiveness, and high conformity"[13] .

All of this scholarship underscores the need to look beyond the narrow lenses of the standardized test. It forces us to raise the question, what does it mean to be a successful minority student? How can black students achieve and still remain rooted and grounded in the knowledge that they are a part of a special heritage with important allegiances and responsibilities to black people in their communities, the nation and the world?

Part of the methodological challenge of this work has been finding ways to define these broader notions of success. Although the next section of the paper discusses the methodology more fully, it is important to discuss this aspect of defining <u>success</u> at this juncture. I began by talking to black church members who were parents of children between the ages of 9 and 19. Students in this category represent students in approximately the fourth through twelfth grades. I also asked these parents to identify other parents with children in this age range who might be willing to talk to me about their notions of success and the teachers who taught their children who seemed to promote these notions of

success. While these parents specifically mentioned wanting their children to graduate from high school, attend college, and find a "decent" job, there was also the desire that the children not lose their sense of self as a black person - but be able to "hold their own" in the classroom without "forgetting their own" in the community[16] .

These parents' plea for an education that would not alienate their children from the community also helped me to see the importance of *community (and cultural) standards of excellence*. This is a notion that has guided American education since its inception. The very fact that education is not centrally controlled in this country points to the insistence and persistence of the community to foster schools which reflect the knowledge, values and attitudes it deems important. It is why German immigrants of the late 19th century demanded instruction in German and why middle class Cubans who came to the Southeastern U.S. as they fled the Castro revolution demanded instruction in Spanish. It is why students in Wisconsin are required to learn about the "cooperative" system of farming. Unfortunately, there has been little or no attention paid to the educational desires of poor, disenfranchised minority communities. Only glimpses of black cultural excellence have been seen in the many Black Independent schools which exist throughout the nation[17]. This black cultural excellence is not only manifested in high standards of performance (e.g. artistic, athletic, oratorical) but also in high standards of relationships (familial, social, communal) and of being (e.g. identification vis a vis humanity, culture, gender, and age)[18]. The importance of

identifying black cultural excellence is to make clear that while there does exist this 'acting white' phenomenon among high achieving black students, it must not be assumed that school failure is the same as 'acting black'.

Thus, in order to be true to the desires of the community I intend for my research to serve, I had to come up with a definition for success that was consistent with what black parents and community[11] members really want. That definition had to move beyond the typical "settling for less" that black people have, in too many cases, come to expect.[12] My work is guided by a conception of success as the ability of black students to "choose" academic excellence (success) without losing their sense of self as black people.

Thus, in order for teachers to demonstrate a successful pedagogy for black students, the results of that pedagogy must be black students who are not only academic successes in the classroom (vis a vis skills, knowledge, attitudes measured both through tests and teacher professional judgement) but also are cultural successes in their everyday lives (as judged by their clear identification with and commitment to black culture). One of the tangible examples of this black cultural excellence is in the mission of historically black colleges and universities.

An African - American Way of Knowing

Being in the position of 'the other', many African-American scholars have wrestled with ways in which to conduct scholarly

inquiry which is consistent with the ways people of African descent see and experience the world. Asante's[21] concept of "Afrocentricity" provides a much needed tool for interpretation, explanation, and analysis of black life and culture. This notion of "Afrocentricity" has even found its way into the curricula of urban school districts which serve large numbers of black students.[22]

This Afrocentric approach to research has guided my inquiry throughout this project - asking parents to define success for their students, asking them to identify teachers who help promote that success, talking with the teachers about what they know, do and believe - all represent a departure from traditional ways of uncovering data and conducting research. The urgency of the educational crises black youth are facing (mentioned in the introduction) forces the African - American researcher to conduct his/her research in ways that not only reveal truths of black life and experience but that also promote black cultural excellence.

The overall study involves four basic components: 1) selecting teachers, 2) interviewing, observing and videotaping teachers, 3) analyzing and interpreting data, and 4) designing and refining models of successful teaching (for black students). I am currently working on the second component. While these omponents,alone, do not represent an African - American way of knowing, the way in which they are undertaken does.

I asked parents which teachers in the local public schools they felt were most likely to produce the kind of success in their children that they were seeking. These parents had no difficulty

in identifying teachers they felt met their criteria. The idea of relying upon the parents as "experts" is consistent with Foster's" notion of "community nomination". This community nomination occurs when members of a community and/or its recognized community resources (e.g. newspapers, magazines, organizations) identify a successful teacher. This procedure of identifying teachers is compatible with a quest for the black cultural excellence previously discussed. I then asked local school principals to identify their "best" teachers for me (and the basis for selecting these teachers). Principals reported that they made their selections on the basis of student achievement growth (test scores), classroom management, observed teaching skills, and student enthusiasm. The teachers who were identified by both parents and principals comprised my sample. In two cases, because of the short tenure of the principals (less than five years), I "cross-checked" their recommendations with other teachers on the faculty.

Thus far, I have identified and talked with eight (8) teachers in a small, predominately black, K-8 school district. The student population is approximately 3,500. All of the teachers are female, five are black, three are white. All have had a long history of teaching in predominately black school settings". What follows is an attempt to introduce you to two of these teachers - to personalize and humanize their story - and to broaden the notion of what it means to be a successful teacher of black students.

Miss Winston: Older and Better

Gertrude Winston[3] is every Hollywood director's stereotype for the part of the "Ole Schoolmarm". A white woman, never married, gray haired with bifocals, Miss Winston has taught elementary school for forty years. Her typical uniform is a pair of dark colored polyester slacks, a print polyester blouse, a pair of "sensible" oxford shoes and a key which hangs on a blue shoestring around her neck. She began her teaching in a one room school in a rural Midwestern school district. After twelve years of teaching "farm kids", the spirit of adventure bit her and she decided to join the Peace Corps. This decision led her to a teaching position in West Africa. At the end of her tour, Miss Winston returned to the states and took a teaching position on the West Coast in a predominately black school. After approximately five years she moved northward and settled in a small, predominately black school district where she taught fourth, fifth and sixth graders for twenty-one years.

Walk into Miss Winston's class at any time and it is the model of organization - a place for everything and everything in its place. Unlike the other students in the building, who sit at individual desks, Miss Winston's fifth graders have sleek formica tables where they sit in groups of four. Their books and belongings are housed in brightly colored "cubbies". Miss Winston's room is painted in bright colors of turquoise, yellow and red. Her colleagues live with "hospital green" and "institutional beige". When I first inquired as to how her room happened to <u>look</u> so

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different from everyone else's Gertrude Winston smiled slyly and related the story of how an earlier principal wanted her at his school so badly when there was a district reorganization that she decided to "go for broke" and made "some pretty outrageous requests".

> I worked hard to get this furniture (at my other school) so I said I would not leave the building without it... This classroom was so dull and drab... how could anybody be inspired to do anything in it? I just had to have it painted. [informal conversation,notes]

Miss Winston's voice booms throughout the classroom. This is not an adaptation to the classroom noise level - the classroom is relatively quiet - Miss Winston always speaks loudly - on the playground, in the teachers' lounge, in a private conversation. And, she laughs, a lot! What is it that has compelled this chubby, grandmotherly like white woman to spend her life teaching black children in poorly equipped, urban schools?

For one thing, Gertrude Winston likes black people. Her ties to the school community are both deep and extensive. At least half of her adult friends are black. But, her ties to black people represent more than a fascination with the culture. Through her relationships with black people Gertrude Winston has found an affirmation of her self. Contrary to the outcast status single, never married women find in white American society, Miss Winston

is valued and appreciated for her teaching gifts in this black community. This acceptance has helped Miss Winston to identify features of black children's lives that she feels are quite similar to her own life.

> Black children remind me of farm children...(my) coming from a rural situation. Because farm children always had responsibilities. You always had chores... outside sort of things. Black kids sort of remind me of that because they seemed to have responsibilities at home... babysitting and that sort of thing.... (They) also show a great deal of caring for their siblings. I mean if you share something (with them) they always save something out to take it home to share... I also had the feeling that there was not a lot of competition.... Everybody helped everybody (else) to succeed. They were always willing to help somebody else learn something. [Sp1-1,note 1]"

Unlike teachers who have been judged ineffective teaching minority students" Miss Winston does not see her students' lives as "strange", "sad", "pitiful" or "pathetic".She sees the commonalities in the children's lives and her own. Along with her strong identification with and acceptance by black children (people) Miss Winston also identifies strongly with teaching. When

I asked her how she'd been able to last in teaching for the last 40 years she laughed as she remarked:

> I just like teaching... I'm not one of those people who is affected by 'burnout'.... I 'm also very stubborn. I don't like to fail at anything so I'm not one to quit. I've had a lot of fun teaching... I can't think of anything else that's more fun. [Sp1-8,note 2]

When she talked about her teaching she underscored the importance of believing in the students, not the test scores:

> ...I always had the feeling with black children that...we always under estimated what they could do. And, one of the things I find is, the more you expect of them, the more they could do... and I've always argued that nobody ever measured what the children really were capable of doing. [Sp1-2,note 3]

She also talked about the secondary importance of teaching "academics":

> We always had projects going at some time whether they were arts and crafts projects or ... something that allowed them to have another avenue to be successful and, again, another avenue in which

> they could show other children what to do and then, of course, I've never been sold that academics was the most important thing (laughs) in the classroom... [Sp1-2,note 4]

Gertrude Winston's project approach does not mean that her classroom is a year-round recreation center. Her quilting project is designed to help her students understand how women and children spent their leisure time during colonial times. Her puppet making project is an extension of language arts learnings in which students make the puppets, the puppet stage, write, direct and perform the play. Her hamster project is an extension of science learnings. Her students keep data sheets on the differential growth of hamsters on various diets. And, no matter what grade she teaches, fourth, fifth or sixth, Gertrude Winston reads to and with her children. She reads wonderful stories, Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, Phillip Hall Likes Me, I Reckon, Nobody's Family is Going to Change, to capture their imaginations, to extend their personal experiences, and to find yet another way to connect with them and their way of being."

Miss Winston also "connects" with the parents. She believes that her success in her current school district comes from her initial interactions with the parents:

> I think the biggest thing I learned was to be honest, you know, whenever you were talking with parents as far as the children were con-

> cerned... to be very honest with your approach to those parents because they could see right through you. [Sp1-3, note 5]

Miss Winston also recognizes the need for parent support:

> ...You always got great support from parents. Children soon learned that if they were in trouble in school they weren't going to be (laughs) totally supported from home. I mean their parents would come down and they'd hear the side of the story and ... nine times out of ten the parent supported the teacher and what you were trying to do... the other thing is that they expected you to know what you were doing. They, afterall, had turned their child over to you and they expected you to do the very best that you could with their child... I think they put a lot of trust in the teacher. [Sp1-4,note 6]

Gertrude Winston believes that public school teaching is at least an eleven month job. She dedicates one month of her two month summer vacation to preparing for the next year's class. She purchased her own reconditioned duplicating machine and turned one section of her home into a workroom in which to prepare teaching materials. On day one of school, her students walk into a classroom

that has a host of specially made materials with each of their names on them. She is second only to the early morning custodian in arriving to school each day. Class begins at 8:30 but Miss Winston is working happily in her room by 7:30. By 7:45 some of the children whose parents have left for work begin arriving at her door. Unlike many of the other teachers who admonish the students that they are not permitted in the building before the bell, Miss Winston welcomes their company. They come in and chat, play a few games of checkers, and even work on incomplete math assignments. Students from other classes often ask if they may join in also. Miss Winston usually issues a stern warning about expected behaviors but almost never turns away a visitor. Miss Winston is also one of the last adults to leave the school building each day. Once again, a contingent of youngsters remain to "keep her company", finish an assignment, or play one of the many board games available to them.

This convivial student - teacher relationship extends beyond the classroom walls. Miss Winston invites students to her home for lunch or dinner and has, on occasion, had a few of the female students sleep over for a weekend. On one such weekend one of the students was puzzled at Miss Winston's photographs of nieces and nephews hanging prominently on her living room wall. "Miss Winston, what are you doing with all these pictures of these white kids?" the student blurted out. After a moment it dawned on the student that Miss Winston was <u>white</u> ! The student recognized that Miss Winston had so closely identified with them that, her way of acting toward them, her easy manner, her stern reprimands, her generosity,

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all represented a manner more reminiscent of a mother or other close relative than a teacher, particularly other white teachers.

But it is more than the fact that students like Miss Winston and she likes them that makes her an example of successful teaching for black students. Students achieve academic excellence in her classroom. They are pushed, goaded, and coached into performing at high levels. She rewards achievement and does not permit failure. Students who fail to complete homework assignments spend time doing it during recess or after school. Her responsibility to them is total. They rarely see the inside of the principal's office:

> ...I just cannot go with that (sending students to the principal's office) - everytime something goes wrong the child winds up in the principal's office.... Of course if I say 'this will be accomplished or you will stay in... you know, I mean it. You <u>will</u> give up your time' ! [Sp1-5, note 7]

Gertrude Winston believes there is no excuse for not teaching children. Despite the conventional arguments about lack of adequate resources, materials and supplies, Miss Winston believes anyone who calls him/herself a teacher has an obligation to find ways around those limitations in order to teach:

> ...I did a lot of substituting of things, too. You know, we didn't have health books so we did health in another way.... There was a period of

> time when we didn't have social studies books, so - well, I never got so involved in whether we had the book or not but it was 'What were some of the skills you needed to learn to function in social studies like - can you research something, do you know how to find information?' We always seemed to manage to find basic supplies, of course, we did buy a lot of supplies ourselves, but I never regretted that. [Sp1-5, note 8]

One of Gertrude Winston's colleagues who taught the same grade was a black male teacher who had spent several years as an assistant principal". His real aspiration was to become a principal but it did not appear that it would happen in this district. He resented being placed back in the classroom and believed that Miss Winston had been given the most academically talented of the fifth graders. In truth, the students had been randomly assigned to the fifth grade classes. A closer examination of the class rolls and previous year's test scores indicated that, in actuality, he had more of the "high achieving" students. However, even the most inexperienced of classroom observers can not help but notice the sharp contrast between the two classes. Miss Winston's class is orderly, yet exciting, demanding, rigorous, and challenging. The students <u>work</u> from the time they arrive until the time they leave and they seem to love it!

By contrast, the black male teacher's class is chaos. Most of the class time is spent trying to keep order and trying to keep the students occupied with "seatwork". The classroom walls are bare, the students sit in individual desks arranged in rows, and the teacher spends most of his time seated at his desk in the front of the classroom. This teacher arrives a few minutes before the students each morning and leaves as soon as the teachers' association contract allows.

The difference in the quality of education that fifth graders in this school receive is not in the amount of supplies, the amount of the per pupil expenditure, or even the instructional leadership of the principal. It is the difference in Miss Winston and this male teacher. One is older and better!

Mrs. Dupree: A Lean, Mean, Teaching Machine

Pauline Dupree could easily be mistaken for a business executive. She dresses in a stylish, conservative manner. Her clothes, shoes and accessories are coordinated and each day she appears to step out of the pages of a "Dress for Success" catalog. Her dress belies the relatively low salary she earns as a teacher in a poorly funded, low-income school district. But, she believes that the way she dresses is important to the fourth grade children she teaches and has taught for the past twenty two years:

> ... I do notice that many white teachers
> come into our schools and look as if they're

> going as someone would say, "as if they're going to work in someone's kitchen". And I do think that it has an effect on how students respond and respect you... because each day my students, my girls, will stand at the door and they will compliment me on my dress, my shoes (laughs) and they're wondering where do I get all my shoes. One said... 'Miss Dupree, you have a pair of shoes the color of everything that you wear'... I think that (teacher's dress) has an impact on how students react to you. [Sp7-4, note 9]

Pauline Dupree's concern about her appearance represents one of the ways she establishes a bond between herself and her students:

> If they see that I care enough to dress nicely to come here to be with them they realize how important they are to me... I see them as <u>very</u> important people... what I'm doing here is very important. [Sp7-4,note 10]

Pauline Dupree is a black woman who grew up in the deep South in the 1950's and 60's. She attended a small, historically black college in her native Mississippi. She describes her early life as "completely black". She attended an all black elementary school, high school and college. In this pre-desegregation era, all of her

teachers were black. She grew up in an all black community and decided on a career as a teacher partly because it was something of a tradition in her family and partly because it was one of the few career options available to black women at that time.

Pauline began her teaching career in Mississippi and after one year moved on to Chicago. After five years in Chicago she moved to Northern California and is completing her seventeenth year in this district. Her long history of teaching primarily black students has helped her form some opinions about black youngsters as a cultural group that she believes contrast with that of some other teachers:

> Well, they seem to bring ...a spirit of cooperation. They're very willing to help. They're very open-minded. I think they will really open up to you if they feel that you're very sincere with helping them... in any way. They're very verbal. Our children are very verbal!
>
> I think there are a lot of attitudes about black students. I think a lot of people have preconceived ideas about black children... and I think our children are given too many labels and I think many educators use this as a means to not truly educate our students. [Sp7-2, note 11]

Mrs. Dupree describes herself as a no frills, no nonsense teacher. She is unimpressed with educational fads and trends. She

has clearly defined her mission as teaching students "the essentials":

> ...I sort of focus on reading, math, writing, spelling and language skills. I put most of my energies into those areas because I feel that if a student hasn't mastered the basic skills in those areas then they're not going to be successful in (areas like) science or social studies. I'm a very... I guess you would say an old fashioned teacher. I really believe that a student needs the very basics and I don't do a lot of nonsense things. I really stress the academics. [Sp7-6, note 12]

Despite this admitted stress on the basics, Pauline Dupree realizes that her students need more than a steady diet of "academics".

> ...I try to really get to know the students... I talk to my students quite a bit... not only about academics but about day to day things... just being a person and the kinds of attributes one needs to be a successful person. I use many proverbs in my classroom and we discuss the proverbs. I give the students an opportunity to discuss how they can apply this to themselves. I really like for them to take some control for

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their learning....[Sp7-2, note 13]

A sense of order prevails in Mrs. Dupree's classroom. She has very definite ideas about classroom management and discipline.

> Well, first of all, you must really establish what the rules are, what the consequences are and the first couple of weeks of school I really go through this very thoroughly with the students, making sure that they understand what's expected, what will happen if they don't follow through on it. I find that if you're firm with them in a loving way, they tend to really do what you expect them to do. [Sp7-3, note 14]

A teacher like Mrs. Dupree has very definite beliefs about what her responsibilities are and is not intimidated by the bureaucratic hierarchy of the school:

> We were told that we were not to use language books...that we were to use (series name) books for language. We were told that we were only to use (series name) readers and I refused to stick only to those two books because they don't cover all the skills that the students need... I use supplementary books.

> I ... told my principal... that I did not use (series name) language last year and she didn't say anything because she knew that many of the teachers who had used (them)... their scores were lower. So I'm going to use... I'm responsible for this classroom... I've worked long enough to know what will work and what doesn't work. I'm not going to just blatantly tell a principal what I'm not going to do. I'm just going to do what I need to do in order for students to achieve. [Sp7-6, note 15]

Parents also have a role to play in Mrs. Dupree's classroom. However, she does make a distinction between parent involvement and parent support:

> ...they (the parents) tend to put a lot of responsibility on, well... let me rephrase that. They tend to think that the school is going to deliver... because when I was growing up, parents never came to school. Your parents just believed in the school and thought that the school would do, and they were not all that involved...[Sp7-4,note 16]

> ...I think that I do have the support of all of my parents... I do communicate with the parents, in fact, I would rather have the support than

> the involvement... I have given parents my phone number and some of my parents will call me in the evening time to verify homework or just to clarify something they don't understand. [Sp7-5, note 17]

A visit to Pauline Dupree's classroom reveals a class not unlike its teacher. There seems to be a premium placed on efficient use of time and little room for frivolity. Still, the class is not austere. It is attractively decorated and well organized. The class buzzes with conversations about academic concerns and students readily seek help from Mrs. Dupree or a peer when they are confused about class work. She encourages the students to take responsibility for themselves and each other:

> It's almost impossible to work with (each) student one to one,... I (always) assign them a buddy, someone that will give him all the directions that he needs to know... I let students train each other. [Sp7-8,note 18]

Unlike her neighboring teachers, Mrs. Dupree rarely raises her voice in reprimand. Either a straightforward request or a knowing glance seems to be all that is necessary to return a student to expected behavior.

Mrs. Dupree believes that each of her children can achieve. Despite her cool manner she expresses a loving concern for her students. But, this emotional attachment to the students never gets in the way of the central task of helping the students to achieve.

She works at cultivating a certain persona so that her students will recognize the seriousness of the tasks before them. When asked how she thought her students perceive her she replied:

> The first thing they... say... is that "she's mean" (laughs)...she expects us to do our work and whatever she'd told us to do that's what she expects of us. I can't think of anything else they might say but I'm sure they'd say I was mean! [Sp7-9, note 18]

Superstars or Guiding Lights ?

The question which guides my inquiry as both a scholar and a teacher educator is how much (if anything) of what Miss Winston and Mrs. Dupree do as teachers can be taught to beginning teachers. My initial fears were that these <u>successful</u> teachers of black students were engaging in teaching behaviors so idiosyncratic, so person - specific that new teachers would be hopelessly doomed to reproduce patterns of black scholastic inferiority and/or black cultural alienation.

However, the fact is that these teachers, seemingly so different in their approaches have revealed important similarities in broad categories of behaviors that I believe can be taught and learned. These similarities reflect what I have called <u>culturally</u>

relevant teaching" . Culturally relevant teachers are defined along three important dimensions; their conceptions of themselves and others (including their students), their conceptions of classroom social relations and, their conceptions of knowledge and content.

Conceptions of Self/Other. Culturally relevant teachers see being a teacher as who they are, not just what they do. Thus, Miss Winston and Mrs. Dupree do not participate in the denigrating of the profession or the culture that is so common in the media and general public. As teachers of black students they cultivate a strong identification and solidarity with the students. Their work is not missionary work. They believe they get as much from being with the students as the students get from them (see note 2).

In the process of working with black students, these teachers are transformed. Miss Winston's biological whiteness is a fact that does not interfere with her social, emotional and perhaps even, intellectual blackness. Mrs. Dupree's "dress for success" appearance is designed to provide her students with a visible indicator of their importance to her and the seriousness of the educational enterprise in which they are both engaged (see note 10). Miss Winston and Mrs. Dupree have made conscious choices to dedicate their professional expertise to the black community through the teaching of black students. Miss Winston's choice came as a result of her experiences in Africa and Southern California. Mrs. Dupree's came as a result of a nurturing black environment in the deep South.

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These teachers conceptions or beliefs about of their students is that they can and will succeed not in spite of their blackness but because of it. They see black culture as resilient and resourceful, not disadvantaged and deprived. They believe that by draving upon the students' culture they can help students make necessary transitions to dominant society norms, ideals and values without giving up the richness of their own culture (see notes 3,11).

The implication of this dimension for a teacher education program is to provide students with opportunities for self-reflection and identification. New teachers must see teaching as more than a job. It must be a calling that is enabling and ennobling. New teachers who intend to teach black children must be able to value and celebrate black culture. Their conceptions of blackness, which are likely to be so negatively shaped by dominant culture values, must be transformed. They must move from believing that they are doing a low status work with low status children to understanding the honor of helping to maintain and cultivate black cultural excellence.

Conceptions of Classroom Social Relations. Despite the fact that each of these teachers' classrooms is orderly and well-managed, student - teacher relationships are fluid and 'humanely equitable'[31]. These teachers take ultimate responsibility for what transpires in the classroom without setting themselves up as the boss. These teachers are willing to share power because they understand education as an empowering force not merely a job prerequisite.

The teachers recognize the importance of creating a community of learners and nurture cooperative, supportive classroom arrangements that are more closely aligned with Black students' "home-living" experiences than traditional "school-living"" (see notes 1,4,11) .

The implication of this dimension for teacher education is that teacher candidates must have opportunities to interact with black students in arenas outside of the classroom. They must get to know them as people with specific concerns and a particular struggle which must be overcome; not as pitiful, pathetic victims.

Conceptions of Knowledge/Content. Miss Winston and Mrs. Dupree both make decisions about what content to teach to the students which go beyond district or state mandates (see note 16). The test is not the determiner of these teachers' curriculum. The lives and experiences of their students help shape what (as well as how) they teach. They listen to the students and their parents and create curriculum. They are aware that knowledge does have a political base and what one excludes from the curriculum may be just as important as what one includes(see note 3). They know that the mandated curriculum may fail to include the experiences of black people and consequently, fail to engage the students in meaningful learning (see note 13). Thus, they find ways to take students from "where they are" (academically, culturally, socially,) to "where they need to be". They do this while, at the same time, helping the students develop a critical perspective about their learning and their experiences. When I asked the teachers how they deviated from

teachers' guides or other sources they were given, they both mentioned the need to establish a real purpose for learning anything. Thus, they ask students questions like, "Why do you think I selected this book; what does this have to do with your life; and does this make any sense to you"? Their students are expected to actively participate in shaping their learning experiences, not merely be passive respondents to a predetermined, prepackaged curriculum. Although they supplement the curriculum with different materials and activities (Winston with her projects; Dupree with her proverbs and alternative book series), they both do supplement because they recognize the shortcomings of the materials that are made available for black school children.

The implication of this dimension for teacher education is that students pursuing teaching as a career must be able to develop a critical perspective on the kind of education they received. They must be prepared to address how the content of their own education disadvantaged them and cut them off from opportunities to understand the perspectives of black people.

Finally, this research experience is teaching me the importance of the teacher's voice. Teachers like Miss Winston and Mrs. Dupree need opportunities to tell their stories and relate their teaching experiences to their colleagues, new and old, and to those responsible for the education of teachers. Their pedagogical excellence is being lost because of an unwillingness on the part of administrators, university professors and researchers and the general public to hear them. "He that has ears

to hear, let him listen"!

NOTES

1.Whitaker, C. (1988) "A Generation in Peril" EBONY , Aug. pp.34, 36.

2.Edelman, M. (1987) FAMILIES IN PERIL: AN AGENDA FOR SOCIAL CHANGE. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

3.Kunjufu, J. (1984). DEVELOPING DISCIPLINE AND POSITIVE SELF-IMAGES IN BLACK CHILDREN. Chicago: Afro American Images.

4.Whitaker, op.cit.

5.Ibid.

6.Shavelson, R. and P. Stern (1981) "Research on Teachers' Pedagogical Thoughts, Judgments, Decisions and Behaviors", REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH, 51: 455:498.

7. King, J. and C. Mitchell (in press) BLACK MOTHER'S TO SONS: JUXTAPOSING AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE WITH SOCIAL PRACTICE. New York: Peter Lang Publishers.

8.Wolfson, J. (1987) "Racism Makes Its Mark". SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS, Dec. 6, pp. 1L -2L.

9.Fordham, S. and J. Ogbu (1986) "Black Students' School Success: Coping with the Burden of 'Acting White', THE URBAN REVIEW, 18 (3):1-31.

10. McDevitt, M. "Report on Racial Tension", TIMES TRIBUNE, April 5, 1989, Palo Alto, CA: A1, A12.

11. Ibid., p. A12.

12.Fordham, S. (1988) "Racelessness as a Factor in Black Students' Success: Pragmatic Strategy or Pyrrhic Victory", HARVARD EDUCATIONAL REVIEW, 58, (1): 29 - 84.

13. Bacon, M. (1981) A Report to Sequoia Union High School District: Follow-up Study - High Potential Students from Ravenswood Elementary School District. Redwood City, CA.

14.Fine, M. as quoted in P. McLaren, LIFE IN SCHOOLS: AN INTRODUCTION TO CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IN THE FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION. New York: Longman, p.215.

15.Ibid.

16.Ladson - Billings, G. (1989) "Like Lightning in a Bottle: Attempting to Capture the Pedagogical Excellence of Successful Teachers of Black Students", paper presented at the Tenth Annual Ethnography in Education Research Forum, University of Pennsylvania, February 24 -25.

17. Rattery, J. D. (1986) "Independent Schools: Challenge Reborn", AMERICAN VISIONS, March - April: 55 - 56.

18. see , Boykins, A. W. article in McAdoo, H. and J.L. McAdoo (eds.), (1985). Black Children: Social, Educational, and Parental Environments. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, Inc.

19. The concept of 'the black community' is very complex. Indeed, there is not one, monolithic geographically linked community that can be identified as the black community. However, there does exist a culturally cohesive entity that shares some basic cultural characteristics (see previous note) that allows me to use the term the 'black community'. Its members participate in it on several levels, conscious and unconscious.

20. This notion comes from my colleague Joyce King who points to principal Joe Clark in the Patterson, N.J. schools as an example of the community "settling for less".

21. Asante, M.K. (1987). THE AFROCENTRIC IDEA. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

22. Johnson, J. (1989) "Curriculum Seeks to Lift Blacks' Self-Image", NEW YORK TIMES, March 8: A1, B8.

23. Foster, M. (1988) . Telephone conversation, University of Pennsylvania, Phila. PA, Dec.6.

24. All eight teachers in this study are a part of a larger study of the pedagogical excellence of teachers of black students. Throughout this paper I make reference to preliminary conversation notes, interview notes, and observations that have taken place during the study.

25. The teachers in this paper are identified by pseudonyms.

26. The teachers in the study are identified by a numerical code for analytical purposes. The first code (e.g.Sp7) indicates the teacher. The second code (e.g. 4) indicates the page number of the transcribed interview. Thus, [Sp7-4] is the fourth page of teacher number 7's interview. For the purpose of this paper I have added

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an additional number for ease of reference, e.g. [Sp7-4 note 5] is the fifth interview note in this paper.

27.First, D. and W. Chrichlow, (1989). "Effective Teachers' Knowledge and Educational Practices in Working with 'At-Risk' Students in an Urban School District: A Collaborative Investigation by Teachers and Researchers", paper presented at the Tenth Annual Ethnography in Education Research Forum, University of Pennsylvania, Phila, PA., Feb. 24 -25.

28. The importance of the oral tradition in many non-white cultures is underscored in the work of Au, K. and C. Jordan (1980). "Teaching Reading to Hawaiian Children: Finding a Culturally Appropriate Solution." in H. Trueba, G.P. Guthrie, and K. Au, eds. CULTURE IN THE BILINGUAL CLASSROOM. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

29. I had the opportunity to observe both Miss Winston's class and this black male teacher's class in my role as an educational specialist at the school during the 1983 - 84 school year.

30. Ladson - Billings, op.cit.

31. King, J. and T.L. Wilson (1987). "On Being African American: Beyond Cultural Democracy and Racist Education" Unpublished Manuscript.

32. Gay, G. (1975). "Cultural Differences Important in the Education of Black Children", MOMENTUM, Oct.: 2-5.